BORANG PENGESAHAN STATUS TESIS

JUDUL: Cooperative Learning Through The Integration of The Weblog: Some Observation On 1st and 2nd Year TESL (Teaching English As a Second Language) Undergraduates of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

SESI PENGAJIAN: 2004/2005

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COOPERATIVE LEARNING THROUGH THE INTEGRATION OF THE WEBLOG: SOME OBSERVATION ON 1ST AND 2ND YEAR TESL (TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE) UNDERGRADUATES OF UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

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This Project Report is Prepared as a Requirement for The Bestowal of Bachelor of Science and Education (TESL)

Faculty of Education
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

OCTOBER, 2004
"I admit that this project (Title: Cooperative Learning Through the Integration of the Weblog: Some Observation on 1ST and 2ND Year TESL (Teaching English as the Second Language) Undergraduates of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia) is my own research, except for the citation and summary which the resources of each has been stated and properly acknowledged."

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated the integration of the internet and weblog amongst ESL students. The aim is to find out the extent to which the integration of group weblog promotes active participation through cooperative learning. At the same time this research aims to suggest to ESL teachers some effective approaches of integrating the internet in learning activities. For this research, twenty respondents were chosen amongst first year and second year TESL students from UTM. Most of the respondents were first time users of the weblog. The research was conducted over a duration of 12 weeks. Two instruments were used to obtain data for this research. They are the questionnaire and a group weblog. The respondents were required to join a group weblog which was set up for this research and they have to work cooperatively with the other respondents. Journal writing activities and website reviews were the main sources of data for this research. The data of the research were analyzed qualitatively. The results of the research show that the respondents displayed positive attitude towards weblog and web-based activities. Through the research, most of the respondents reported that using a weblog is interesting and motivating. The weblog allows them to interact freely and to be creative in their writing skills. Besides that the result of the research shows that the integration of internet and web-based activities are beneficial especially amongst ESL students.
ABSTRAK

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The existence of the Internet and the progressive development of computer technology in the late 20th century have unlocked our potentials to vast and borderless realm of knowledge. The ample accessibility to the World Wide Web provided by the Internet is beneficial to a second language (L2) class. Initially, it promotes interesting and experiential approaches especially in a second language learning process. Currently, the Internet is increasingly considered as a pedagogical tool to enhance language teaching and the learning process (Dies, 1995; Oliva and Pollastrini, 1995; Patrikis, 1995).
The integration of the Internet in L2 class allows both teachers and students to gain especially for the abundance of authentic materials on the World Wide Web (WWW) in the learning process. The internet helps the students to be active and interactive with a larger group of learners through virtual exploration. Aside linking them to the knowledge needed, it also provides them the opportunity to be literate in the target language as well as computer. Since one of the main goals of “language learning is to be able to correspond effectively on a global scale” (Powers, 1997), it is most appropriate and beneficial to integrate computer-mediated technology into today’s L2 classrooms so that the students can succeed in the real world through virtual exploration.

The computer-mediated technology provides teachers and students with not only a large repository of resources but also more recent information. Students are exposed to masses of authentic resources and this can increase their full potentials to be competent in the target language. With this perception in mind, second language teachers are encouraged to implement web-based activities in the teaching and learning process. In addition to the computer being a beneficial tool for the students, it is also a highly effective instrument for teachers. Smith (1995) asserted that computer technology enables teachers to clearly illustrate, in a precise and interesting manner, concepts to the entire class simultaneously.

There are basically two types of technologies available on the Internet: non-interactive and interactive. Non-interactive technologies which include Netscape and Internet Explorer are often used as reference tools which allow users to view input information via online newspapers or websites while interactive technologies, such as E-mail and chat lines provide opportunities for users to receive input and produce output (Lafford and Lafford, 1997). Online current information resources compiled globally allow users to seek out and gain a wide variety of topics. E-mail systems offer prospects
for authentic communication, making possible immediate cross-cultural information exchanges with native speakers of the target language globally.

The integration of Internet in the classroom can make learning experiences become interesting and it can offer some curricular advantages that traditional textbooks cannot. Berge and Collins (1995) asserted that the students are given the best opportunity to gather information in an exploratory manner via the Internet. Therefore, computer-mediated technology is a suitable and beneficial tool for L2 learning because it promotes language and cultural knowledge, boosts up motivation and students’ interest, strengthens linguistic skills, provides authentic opportunities to students that traditional textbooks do not, and enhances the students’ abilities. It also grants the students with flexibility and freedom, and allows collaboration and social unity throughout the process as mentioned by Paulsen in Berge and Collins (1995).

In short, the teaching and learning process in L2 class will be a better platform for the students to foray into their future with the support of the Internet. In relation to that, the purpose of this study is to find the effectiveness of the internet in promoting the learning of L2 amongst the students.

1.1 Background of the Problem

Since the launching of Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) project, Sekolah Bestari (Smart School) has been on the top priority of one of its flagships. The Malaysian Smart School program is a long-term agenda for our government to promote computer literacy with the integration of IT especially to the younger generation. Since
then, the smart school concept in education is one of the most talked-about topics among educators and trainers in Malaysia. According to Somekh and Davis (1997), the integration of IT in the classroom can provide innovative learning experiences to the students and this is what the Smart School projects profess to do.

With increasing emphasis on student-centred learning and the potential of the computer-mediated technology, it is crucial to implement computers in the L2 classroom. Previously, teachers and students respond only to a scarce source of information and had limited interaction within their classroom activities. The L2 learning process is usually filled with drill and practice activities which is insufficient to accommodate the students’ needs. Now, with the Internet resources and activities, it imparts opportunities for additional ‘comprehensible input’; one of the necessary elements of second language acquisition (Krashen 1982). The Internet also offers self-paced, learner-centred instruction which helps to lower students' "affective filter" as proposed by Krashen (1982), and promote individualized learning styles (Omaggio, 1993).

According to Chitravelu et. al. (1995), writing is a system of interpersonal communication using visible signs or graphic symbols on paper. Fundamentally, writing enables students to get valuable practice in using the target language. Now, with the emergence of the Internet in the L2 classroom; the students can gain access to endless knowledge as they involve actively throughout the process. The activities will gradually transform writing as a teaching tool instead of serving as a task to the students. Bruner (1973) explained that active participation can be achieved through discovery learning environments. Thus, the integration of Internet may promote students’ participation in learning process and later improve their understanding in communicative competence and use of the language.
Bean (1996) suggested that writing activity is “one of the ways to coach critical thinking”. Based on the given suggestion, a writing activity allows the students to broaden their way of thinking by sharing and this can be done within a group of students. Web-based writing activities promote exciting possibilities for innovative and creative thinking skills beyond classroom opportunities in the teaching and learning of the English language. By using E-mail and chat room for example, the students will interact beyond the traditional confines of the classroom. The move away from set tasks associated with conventional classroom-based instruction encouraged a natural move towards, and support of work which evolved directly from students' own interests, experiences and responses (Sakar, 2001). The students can participate actively compared to the classroom approach as students are able to use E-mail to exchange ideas, express opinions and discuss selected topics with their peers, their instructor and native speakers. Beauvois (1997) reported that computer-mediated communication increased total class participation to 100%. In short, the Internet technology creates more opportunities for students to use the target language to interpret and discuss meaning with others outside the classroom (Savignon, 1983, p.284).

Web-based activities encourage the students to be independent and allow self-paced learning process, thus the students will enjoy as they learn. However, the students can still work together to accomplish shared learning goals through online discussion activity. Briefly, cooperative learning promotes interactivity as each person within a group responds to each other and contributes ideas during the discussion. Cooperative learning also provides invaluable opportunities for the students to demonstrate his mastery of the task and to be interdependent. Furthermore, the experience motivates the students even more when computer technology is implemented in the learning activities (Roblyer et. al., 1997).

Cooperative learning is beneficial to classroom diversity and has a positive impact on students especially those who are shy and passive in the classroom.
Consequently, students in cooperative classrooms also tend to have better attendance, earn higher grades and became active learners (Fennell, 1994).

According to Roblyer et. al. (1997), learning process is motivating when students can relate it to their own experience and access to the computer is easy. In reality however, to gain access to computers for learning was far from ideal. The students usually share the same computers between several classes. In most schools, they were normally located in a specialized computer room which had to be booked in advance. With the limited number of computers and the restrictions on their uses, the students could only spend a few hours to work with the computers as they are still required to share with other fellow schoolmates.

In summary, when integrated properly and efficiently, computer technology becomes a powerful and beneficial tool for both the students and the teachers. In fact, the students are almost at a disadvantage if they do not utilize the opportunity to exploit it in their learning, because it is a skill they will be required to perform in the future. After all, the crucial goal of language learning is to fully prepare the students for the real world, and computer technology provides the potential of global communication and interactions.

1.2 Statement of Problem

In L2 learning, cooperative learning is considered as an effective method in promoting students’ acquisition of the target language. Although cooperative learning creates a communicative environment for the students, to a certain extent classroom
interaction is still empowered by the teacher and involved one way communication. Given that, the students are still playing the passive roles in the classroom learning activities.

Many TESL undergraduates have corresponded with keypals in English via E-mails. This has allowed them to practice English and to learn to communicate in the target language. In addition, it is a highly motivating way for students to get valuable practice in both reading and writing. Not only can e-mail exchange improve specific skill areas, it can also have a profound impact on students' attitudes towards the target language, and it can provide them with their first chance to use the language outside the classroom context. The Internet provides them with masses of information online regardless of the topics. The integration of the Internet has broaden the approaches to teaching the L2 and promote greater opportunities for learners to gain exposure to the target language.

Recently, the integration of the Internet in the L2 classroom has lightened up the teaching and learning approach. Students contribute actively for the learning process whereby they utilize the computer and the Internet in completing their given task. Since the evolution of networks, computers are able to offer L2 learners more than drills; "They can be a medium of real communication in the target language, including composing and exchanging messages with other students in the classroom or around the world" (Oxford, 1990, p.79).

However, Somekh and Davis (1997) mentioned that it is very important to bear in mind that the task given should be suitable to enable students autonomy in learning. The student-centred learning process is suitable for a computer-mediated classroom. Therefore, the integration of the Internet in the L2 classroom has opened a broader avenue to students for authentic materials through cooperative learning which is vital in
their daily lives. The integration of computer technology in the learning process enables student-centred learning whereby they take full charge of the classroom activities.

Initially, cooperative learning approach differs from occasional use of group work in a classroom. A teacher would be able to pose a clear task for students to complete and provide specific instructions to them. King (1993) said that the teacher’s role changes as the students discover information which fosters individual accountability and responsibility towards their group as well as the whole class. However, it is difficult to integrate cooperative learning with a large group of students in normal classroom setting. The teacher will have to deal with noise made by the students, time constraint to conduct a proper lesson or the lack of authentic materials for each student.

In order to curb the above matters, one can try to integrate cooperative learning and the internet. The combination will make the learning more organized and efficient. It will also provide opportunity for the students to participate actively and share useful information with their peers. One of the ways is to have an online discussion session whereby the students are to work in groups and find information on the net either individually or with their peers in order to complete the given task.

1.3 Research Objectives

There has been a considerable amount of research on how to optimize a language-learning environment with the assistance of technology (i.e. computer network). This research is concerned with the outcome of the integration of the
Internet technologies and cooperative learning experience in L2 writing class. Particularly, this research is based on the research objectives below:

i. promoting exchanges of experiences that can encourage students’ participation through net surfing and web blog.
ii. integrating weblog into L2 class through cooperative learning.
iii. promoting research habits amongst the L2 learners.

1.4 Research Questions

The research pursues to answer the following research questions:

i. In what way does cooperative learning within the weblog encourage/discourage participation among the respondents?
ii. To what extent does cooperative learning through weblog affect respondents’ interaction in completing a group task?

1.5 Scope of the Study

For the purpose of this research, the investigation was conducted in UTM among twenty undergraduate students currently enrolled in their 1st and 2nd year in a teaching of English as Second Language programme. The research was organized and conducted with the integration of a group weblog in which the respondents were the members. The research focused on the outcome of integrating the Internet and weblog in promoting